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Nova Scotia government workers who refused COVID 19 shot can return to work March 21

By Keith Doucette • The Canadian Press

Posted March 10, 2022 2:59 pm ▾



Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston announced on Wednesday the removal of the proof of vaccination requirement on Feb. 28. He said it has “served its purpose” and it was meant only as a temporary measure – Feb 23, 2022

When Nova Scotia lifts all of its remaining public health restrictions later this month, public employees in sectors considered non-high risk who refused to be vaccinated against [COVID-19](#) can return to their jobs.

Following a cabinet meeting Thursday, Public Service Commission Minister Colton LeBlanc said 84 civil servants are eligible return to work March 21 when restrictions, including indoor mask mandates, are dropped.

“I would say the vast majority of those that were placed on unpaid leave will be able to return,” LeBlanc told reporters.

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The minister said a number of civil servants who were initially placed on leave back in November were allowed to return to work after getting vaccinated, although he couldn’t give a specific number.

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LeBlanc’s department clarified later on Thursday that fewer than five of the 84 civil servants on unpaid leave could remain barred from work due to the protocol for high-risk settings affecting the Department of Community Services and the correctional service.

The department said that since Dec.1, a total of 18 employees became fully or partially vaccinated and returned to work.

Meanwhile, Health Minister Michelle Thompson said there are no plans to allow back on the job unvaccinated health-care workers.

“There is no change in our policy around health-care workers,” Thompson told reporters.

COVID-19 vaccination is a condition of employment by Nova Scotia’s health authority, including for all new hires.

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In early December, the province reported that more than 1,000 public sector workers had been placed on unpaid leave, including 963 workers in front-line health care, continuing care, education and corrections.

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Nova Scotia’s health authority said in an email that 252 full- or part-time employees were still on unpaid leave as a result of the vaccination policy. “We continue to encourage those impacted by Nova Scotia Health’s policy to start or complete vaccination,” the authority said.

Also on Thursday, the province released its first COVID-19 data since March 4, following a switch from daily to weekly updates. The report indicated a continued downward trend in hospitalizations and deaths attributed to the novel coronavirus.

Officials reported 1,382 new positive results from PCR testing and 33 new hospital admissions, adding that there were 50 people in hospital due to the disease. Five more COVID-19 deaths were also reported.

Despite the trends, Thompson said the province's health system remains under stress at about 100 per cent capacity with increased demand for beds, particularly in western Nova Scotia.

"We still continue to have staff off because of illness or exposure, so there are still staffing and bed pressures certainly throughout the system," she said.

Thompson said 320 health-care staff were off the job as of Wednesday due to illness or exposure to COVID-19.

"As the mandates end, I just want people to be aware that COVID-19 is still circulating and we continue to watch it closely," the minister said.

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